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ABSTRACT

Three major purposes have been proposed for Professional Development Schools: (1) to improve education of prospective and practicing teachers; (2) to strengthen knowledge and practice in teaching; and (3) to strengthen the profession of teaching by serving as models of promising and productive structural relations. At present there is neither a fully realized Professional Development School in the country nor a consensus about the mission of such schools. This Digest explores the proposed purposes of these schools and some of the research studies that provided the concepts upon which they would be based. Some critiques of the concept of the schools are also noted. (JD)

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THE NATURE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCHOOLS

ERIC Digest 4-89

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ERIC DIGEST

EDO-SP 4-89

The Nature of Professional Development Schools

Professional Development Schools can be viewed as both a product of the current educational reform movement and a means to achieve some of its goals. Variously known as Professional Development Schools (Holmes Group, 1986), clinical schools (Carnegie Corp., 1986), and professional-practice schools (Levine, 1988), these exemplary school sites are seen as key components in efforts to improve pupil learning by improving teaching.

Although many projects are underway nationwide to establish clinical schools, it appears that at present there is neither a fully realized Professional Development School in the country nor a consensus about the mission of such schools (Olson, 1989). The American Federation of Teachers has published a monograph on professional practice schools which includes a conceptual model and discusses noteworthy projects that exist (Levine, 1988). Rowell (1988) has identified several essential conditions for successful implementation of clinical schools: conditions which reflect major adjustments in traditional ways of viewing teaching, teachers, and teacher education.

Purposes

Three major purposes have been proposed for Professional Development Schools: (1) to improve education of prospective and practicing teachers; (2) to strengthen knowledge and practice in teaching; and (3) to strengthen the profession of teaching by serving as models of promising and productive structural relations between teachers and administrators (Sedlak, 1987).

These schools are designed to be outstanding public schools, cooperatively established and maintained by schools of education and selected school districts (Carnegie Corp., 1986; Holmes Group, 1986). They are "real world" schools which include pupils from various backgrounds. They are jointly staffed by outstanding professional teachers and university faculty to provide appropriate environments for clinical instruction and professional socialization of new and veteran teachers (Holmes Group, 1986).

As an "induction school" for new teachers (Levine, 1988), the function of Professional Development Schools is frequently compared to that of teaching hospitals in the medical profession (Sedlak, 1987). In one model of teacher education, the Carnegie report, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*, proposes that the professional component of teacher preparation, as with other professions, takes place at the graduate level, with the second year of the Masters in Teaching program consisting of a "residency" at a clinical school (Carnegie Corp., 1986). Just as practicing physicians provide much of the clinical instruction in teaching hospitals, both the Carnegie report and the Holmes Group report, *Tomorrow's Teachers*, propose that outstanding practicing teachers (Lead Teachers and Career Professionals, respectively) be included in the core instructional faculty assigned to Professional Development Schools. This practice would be in keeping with one of the goals of Professional Development Schools—to provide opportunities for teachers and administrators to influence development of their profession (Sedlak, 1987) through involvement in initial and continuing teacher education.

One hallmark of Professional Development Schools is collaboration between university and school personnel. Elementary and secondary schools would connect with higher education in more direct ways than currently exist (Carnegie Corp., 1986). These "structured partnerships" would provide opportunities for teachers and administrators to influence the development of their profession, and for university faculty to increase the professional relevance of their work through (1) mutual deliberations on problems with student learning, and their possible solutions; (2) shared teaching in the university and the schools; (3) collaborative research on the problems of educational practice; and (4) cooperative supervision of prospective teachers and administrators (Holmes Group, 1986).

In addition to its training role, the Professional Development School would serve to strengthen knowledge and practice in schools by providing exemplary sites for research, experimentation, inquiry, evaluation, and eventual dissemination of innovative programs and effective practices. They would contribute to the "ongoing refinement and codification of successful teaching and schooling" (Holmes Group, 1986), thus adding to the knowledge base for teaching. These schools would be "actual demonstration sites where recent scholarship could be consistently reviewed and selectively incorporated into operating policy and practices" (Holmes Group, 1986).

A third goal of Professional Development Schools is strengthening the profession by serving as models of promising and productive structural relations among school personnel. New patterns of decision making and shared authority between teachers and administrators can be tested. In this way PDS can contribute to ongoing efforts to restructure schools to facilitate pupil learning by utilizing the expertise of practicing teachers (Holmes Group, 1986).

Additionally, these schools are seen as contributors to the professionalization of teaching. "With respect to professionalization, professional practice schools can have the same impact on teaching that teaching hospitals had on medicine. They can become the institutional base of authority for the profession. The requirements of a profession include the identification of a systematic knowledge base, the presence of a collegial structure, a standard of ethics to guide practice, and a systematic induction into the profession. The professional practice school can provide institutional support for these professional requirements" (Levine, 1988).

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Critiques

Although the concept of Professional Development Schools has been generally well received, some concerns have been voiced. Cuban (1987) questions the appropriateness of the medical education comparison, the analogue of the teaching hospital. His concern appears to be that the compulsory nature of public schooling places certain restrictions on the Professional Development School's freedom to experiment and innovate—restrictions that do not apply to teaching hospitals and that have been insufficiently acknowledged by supporters.

Pinar (1989) is cautious about some collaborative aspects of Professional Development Schools. "Closer links to the schools ought not be viewed uncritically. The powerful press of daily life in the school can function as a kind of 'black hole' into which theory disappears. Survival can come to mean coinciding uncritically with situations as they are . . . While we are friends with our colleagues in the schools—they are our former students—we must maintain a respectful distance from them. We cannot advise or educate those with whom we have thoroughly identified. For teacher educators, the school must remain an object of study as well as a site for success."

Finally, even some supporters of Professional Development Schools acknowledge that unrealistic expectations may overburden these schools. " . . . Some worry that asking schools to simultaneously prepare new teachers, reinvigorate teaching veterans, engage in research, and undertake widespread school improvement efforts may be asking too much" (Olson, 1989).

References

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